Why history and culture matter— a case study from the Virgin Islands National Park

Crystal Fortwangler and Marc Stern

Summary. The best path to improving relationships with local residents is through treating them neither solely as opportunities nor as threats, but first and foremost as people, which mandates a focus on and respect for the unique histories and cultures of the populations inhabiting areas near protected areas. Using data from research carried out by two separate researchers over a period of six years on the Caribbean island of St. John, this article aims to answer the question *how and why do history and culture matter to conservation vis-à-vis protected areas?* Using numerous examples we illustrate the connections between cultural and historical understanding, trust, and the maintenance of resources within the protected areas of St. John, which is part of the U.S. Virgin Islands. We explain the significance of historical and cultural influences upon local responses to protected areas and highlight their consequences for the protection of the resources therein. We argue that the ways in which people interpret protected area agencies' level of respect for and attention to their unique histories and cultures can have significant impacts upon the success of their management. We also highlight the significance of appropriate cultural and historical interpretation and communication in developing the relationships upon which local nature protection depends. Our results show that park planners and managers should place greater emphasis on viewing park neighbors as people just like themselves, who care about the places in which they live and have emotional connections to the landscapes and histories encompassed within protected area borders. Just as the realisation has come about that natural resource management should be based on sound natural resource science, in the human-dominated landscapes that surround and infiltrate most protected areas, the successful protection of resources will also be dependent upon sound social science.

The relationships between protected areas and people living within their immediate vicinities are significant for a number of reasons. The impacts parks have on local residents can be tremendous, ranging from restricting access to vitally important and historically available resources to reshaping the entire economy of a region by attracting both tourists and new types of residents, thus changing the resource base. A great body of literature characterises (and often laments) such impacts and raises significant moral arguments on behalf of those affected.[1] Another body of literature tends to characterise local residents as potential threats to protected areas through continued resource exploitation.[2] Still others characterise local residents as opportunities for partnership and improved conservation based upon their knowledge of the landscapes they live in, their ability to influence adjacent land use, and the potential for labor and support they provide.[3] No matter which characterisation one favors, interacting well with people living on the peripheries (or within) protected areas will always present a critical challenge for successful resource protection.

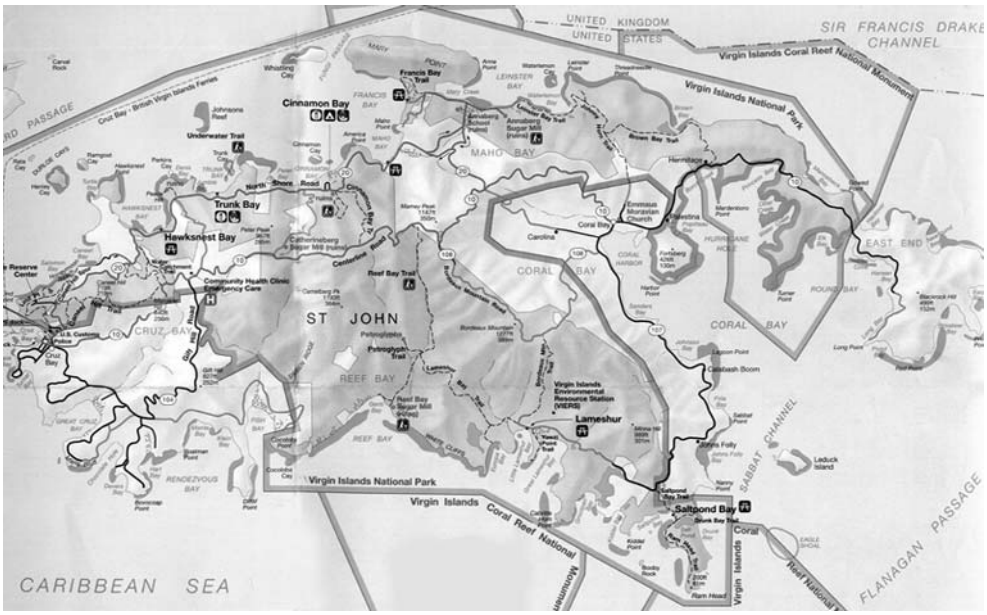
We argue that the best path to improving relationships with local residents is through treating them neither solely as opportunities nor as threats, but first and foremost as people, which mandates a focus on and respect for their unique histories and culture. Using data from research carried out by two separate researchers over a period of six years on the Caribbean island of St. John, this article aims to answer the ques-

tion *how and why do history and culture matter to conservation vis-à-vis protected areas?* In doing so, we take a managerial viewpoint, linking cultural and historic factors directly to the protection of park resources. In this way, we hope to bridge the gap between those viewing people primarily as threats and those viewing them as opportunities, since the one thing all natural resource managers should share in common, by their very mandates, is concern for the well-being of the resources they are charged with protecting.

Both anthropological and sociological methods were employed by each researcher. Fortwangler has been conducting research on St. John for over 6 years, living on the island for a period totaling two years. She employed traditional ethnographic techniques (*e.g.*, participant observation) and semi-structured interviews (N=90) to analyze the relationships between natural resource politics and the sense of place of island residents. Interviews focused on the relationships people have with St. John and the people living on the island, visions they have about the island and questions specific to the protected areas. Stern's research presented herein employed structured interviews (N=115) and participant observation to gauge the relative importance of different types of evaluations undertaken by local residents in formulating their responses to the park. Statistical tests were employed to determine the relative significance of respondents' assessments of the costs and benefits associated with the park's presence on the island, perceptions about the attitudes of their peers, perceived levels of local involvement in park-related decisions, and levels of trust for local park managers. In addition to demographic and other situational characteristics, open-ended questions explored the factors most powerfully influencing these assessments.[4]

St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands

Approximately two-thirds of St. John's land area and 5,650 acres of submerged lands lie within the authorised boundaries of the Virgin Islands National Park (established 1956) and 12,708 acres of submerged lands comprise the Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument (established 2001). Both protected areas are under the jurisdiction of the U.S. National Park Service. In 1976, the park was designated a biosphere reserve by UNESCO. Each year over one million tourists visit the park, many of them cruise ship passengers, to appreciate the beaches, coral reefs, flora and fauna, trails, and historical structures. The resident population of about five thousand is diverse, with about a third native St. Johnians,[5] a third from the continental United States, and



Map 1. Recent map of the Virgin Islands National Park and the Coral Reef National Monument. *(Courtesy National Park Service)*

another third from other Caribbean islands.

St. John's population and land use patterns have changed over time. Human settlers reached St. John between 2000 – 1000 BCE and by 1200 CE the Taino people occupied St. John. By 1520 CE, traces of the Taino had vanished, likely killed or forced off of the island by European expeditions to the region. In 1718, the uninhabited island was claimed by Denmark and by 1730 had been divided into 100 plantation holdings with just over 1000 enslaved people from the western coast of Africa. Three years later, approximately 150 of the enslaved people planned a revolution and succeeded in taking over the island. For three months the former slaves held the island; when it was retaken by colonial forces, many of those involved in the revolution were killed or committed suicide. Plantations and slavery persisted until the mid 1800s, when a variety of factors brought the system to its end. At the time of Emancipation in 1848, there were over two thousand enslaved people on St. John and a community comprised primarily of free persons of color who lived on the east end of the island.[6] Native St. Johnians today trace their heritage to these people.

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After the collapse of the plantation system, a new era of land use on St. John emerged. It included a diversified agricultural economy, small-scale forest industry (*e.g.* bay leaf harvesting and charcoal production) and the development of cattle estates.[7] Although the majority of land remained in the hands of a few persons and families, the emerging St. Johnian community acquired small lots of land purchased, transferred, or gifted from the old plantations. They cultivated home gardens, crafted sailing vessels, became skilled fishers and maritime traders, raised goats and cattle, made charcoal, picked and manufactured bay leaves, and made and sold baskets. This system continued through the transfer of the islands from Denmark to the United States in 1917 and lasted until the island's transition to a tourism economy in the 1950s.

One of the prevalent aspects of this time was the barter system that developed as people cultivated provision grounds and raised animals. Relying on trust and reciprocity between neighbors and family alike, people would share pieces of land, crops, childcare and other forms of labor, constructing a basis for the informal, primarily non-monetary, economy that drove the St. Johnian society. It was very common throughout the time period leading up to the establishment of the National Park, for people to access or borrow land from large landowners and other neighbors, usually in exchange for some amount of labor or share of their produce, in order to grow crops, graze livestock, or cut wood.[8]

Although support for a protected area on St. John began as early as the 1930s, no official arrangements were made until conservation-minded businessmen Frank Stick and Laurence Rockefeller became involved in the early 1950s. After purchasing just under1500 acres on the island, Stick turned his attention to developing the area as an upscale development and marina but soon abandoned that idea to create a national park. He enlisted the support of Rockefeller, who had already purchased a 650-acre resort area on the island. Rockefeller was interested, particularly because he wanted to prove that economic pursuits and conservation could go hand in hand.[9] Stick already had prior experience linking conservation with capital investments.[10] Stick then secured options on the five thousand acres needed to establish a park. Some of the

land was donated and the remainder was purchased with financial support from Rockefeller. Most of the acreage was acquired from a few non-St. Johnian large landowners with many local families declining to part with their land. The park was dedicated December 1, 1956, the same day Rockefeller opened a remodeled Caneel Bay Plantation resort, a luxurious but simple hotel situated within the boundaries of the park.[11]

Picture 1. The National Park Service Headquarters (shown here) is located in Cruz Bay, the main town on the island. *(Courtesy Crystal Fortwangler)*

Our interviews with St. Johnians revealed concern about the period leading up to the establishment of the park. Many locals felt dispossessed of lands that they had always been able to use to raise crops, gather useful plants, graze their livestock, or make charcoal. Many reported that they were led to believe that the park would be merely a place for recreation and that they would always have access to the land. Concepts of access clearly varied from what park creators were proposing and what locals perceived at the time. It was those retaining small plots who depended upon access to the large estates that likely experienced the greatest impact and felt most betrayed by the park's policies.

Although many St. Johnians were excited about the creation of the park and the job opportunities associated with the opening of the resort, the enthusiasm was soon curbed.[12] By 1958 a local politician is quoted in the *New York Times*: "We have not only been sold down the river, we've been sheared first."[13] Some people's properties were completely surrounded by park lands, without legal easements for ensured access, and people became aware of conflicts between themselves and park managers regarding access to park lands. Questions about property lines still exist today and numerous boundaries are still not surveyed. In retrospect many local residents view the creation of the park as a move by powerful business interests working in concert with the federal government to secure St. John for their own benefit. This sentiment was expressed soon after the park was created and continues today. One native St. Johnian explained, "The park is not here for you. The Park is a money-makin' business... It was deception from the inception." A local Senator said as much in 1958: "if you will look carefully at the map you will see a millionaire's lodge protected by the Federal Government."[14]

The development of the park and resort along with the emergent tourism industry on St. Thomas encouraged St. Johnians to move away from land-based and fishing occupations and into wage labor jobs within the tourism industry. In the early 1960s the population of the island began to expand dramatically as people from other Caribbean islands and the United States migrated to St. John to start new lives, find employment, and establish businesses. Today the island has about 5000 persons. In a period of fifty years (1950 – 2000), the island witnessed a 460% increase in population. In 1950, almost everyone on St. John was born on the island; today most are not. Most recently, St. John has become a favorite location for those building luxury or second homes, vacation villas, and dream houses. For 2003, the Multiple Listing

Service for St. John shows the average sale price of 55 homes sold as $960,000 and the average price of 155 land properties sold as $377,000.

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While most St. Johnians recognise that the park drives much of the local economy and helps maintain the rural feel of the island, there is a wide range of opinions held between and within the diverse communities on the island about these areas and the National Park Service. Opinions range from whole-hearted support to staunch opposition, and actions in relation to the protected areas are as varied. Although only a third of St. John's population trace their roots to the pre-park era, the island's recent native history and culture in many ways still dominate local viewpoints toward the park, particularly negative ones. In the following section we explain how and why this should matter to protected areas managers.

Perceived poor cultural understanding of PA managers: a predictor of local opposition

Over 200 interviews with St. John residents show trends that shed light on why history and culture matter to resource management. In Stern's study, 115 respondents, both native and immigrants to the island, were asked to rate their overall level of satisfaction toward the park on a scale from one to ten, ten being the best. They were then asked to explain why they responded in the ways that they did. Figure 1a and 1b show the most common explanations for these attitudes. The most commonly reported explanations for negative attitudes toward the park were those of cultural incompatibility. People commonly reported that the park management made very little effort to fit in with island culture[15] and often exhibited blatant disrespect for local people. We will address only some of the roots of these complaints in this short report.

Figure 1a. Most commonly reported positive influences on local opinions of VINP

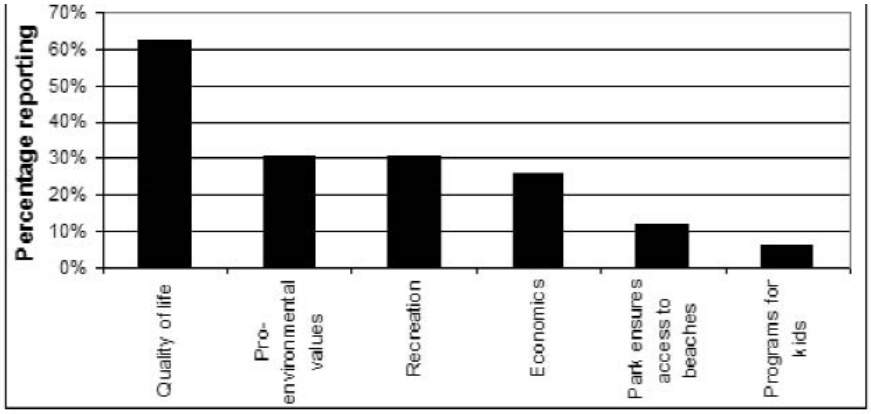
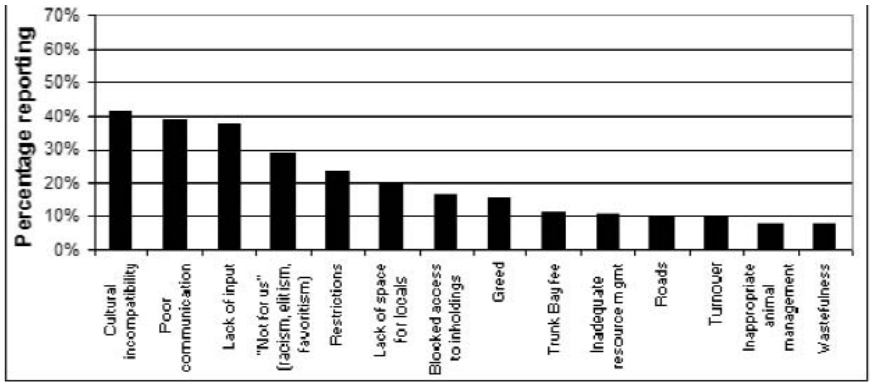


Figure 1b. Most commonly reported negative influences on local opinions of VINP



Respondents were also asked to rate their perceptions of how well they believed that park officials understood the local culture on the island on a five-point scale. Fifty-five percent of native St. Johnians and forty-two percent of non-native residents responded that they didn't understand it at all, while only five respondents suggested that they

understood it very well. In these and in additional interviews, many people reported that they were actually offended by the lack of cultural history included in park interpretation.

The scripted interviews also revealed that the most significant predictor of actions carried out by locals in opposition to the park was their level of trust in park managers. "Opposing" actions were measured as instances of intentional resource damage or illegal harvesting, lawsuits against the park, public campaigning against the park, and/or active protests. Respondents who believed the park managers to be fair and honest with local residents were the least likely to commit such actions. Using the trust variable alone, we can predict with over 81% accuracy, using binary logistic regression, who within the sample is committing these actions and who is not (see Table 1).

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Table 1. Binary logistic regression model predicting active opposition to Virgin Islands National Park

Observed		Predicted OPPOSE 0	Predicted OPPOSE 1	Percentage Correct
OPPOSE	**0**	67	12	84.8
	1	9	24	72.7
Overall Percentage				81.3
Variables in the equation:			**Significance**	
TRUST			p = .001	

Only 25% of the sample reported that they trusted park managers entirely, while nearly half of the sample suggested that they mostly or entirely distrusted park managers.[16] Five-point-scale measurements of trust for park managers were highly correlated with the measurements of perceptions of cultural understanding described above (r = .592, p = .000). In other words, those who felt the park demonstrated higher levels of cultural understanding tended to demonstrate greater trust of park officials.

Building meaningful personal relationships and demonstrating cultural respect appears as important a strategy for park outreach as providing tangible benefits to local populations.

This trend is especially significant because the trust variable proved a significantly better predictor of local opposition to the park than many other measurements commonly assumed to be among the most important predictors of local responses to protected areas, including natural resource use and access restrictions, economic benefits or disadvantages associated with the park, recreational factors, and others.[17] This suggests that building meaningful personal relationships and demonstrating cultural respect may in fact be as important a strategy for park outreach as providing tangible benefits to local populations.

Detailed interviews with St. John residents by both researchers revealed that trust is largely contingent upon common ground between park managers and the people living on the island. While island residents who have come from the mainland United States tend to exhibit slightly higher levels of trust in park managers, many also reported strong distrust. Amongst those non-natives who exhibited active opposition toward the park, about half cited the historical mistreatment of local people by the park and other entities as one of the reasons for their distrust. We thus see strong ripple effects of cultural rifts from one group to another.

These results show clear linkages between local history, cultural understanding, trust,

and tangible negative impacts upon park resources.[18] In the following section we discuss specific events and park management strategies that have influenced responses by local people and highlight some points that are particularly salient to protected areas management in general. We focus upon themes of cultural interpretation, exotic species management, communication, and conflicts between park managers' and locals' sense of place.

Representing histories

St. Johnians' history is embedded within the park's landscape. Much of that recent history, however, has not found its way into park programs.[19] The overall landscape studied and interpreted does not cover the same ground as the one lived and experienced by recent generations of St. Johnians. The history of bay rum and charcoal production, maritime livelihoods, and cattle estates is much less visible in park interpretation than more distant histories, such as those involving the Taino and plantation societies.[20] Moreover, the public has not historically had easy access to the documents tracing significant changes that have occurred on St. John as a result of the park. Until recently, a wonderful collection of photographs and interviews of St. John's more recent past collected since the park's establishment lay rather unorganised in file cabinets in park offices and storage facilities.[21] Deeds of park lands are as well difficult to locate.

One exception to the dearth of interpretation of recent history in the park is an annual event that takes place at the Annaberg sugar plantation ruins.[22] For most of the year, the site hosts basket-making and cooking demonstrations and maintains a small educational garden.[23] The Folklife Festival – showcasing the island's traditional arts and crafts, herbal remedies, food, music, gardening, storytelling, and masquerading, takes place three days out of the year during Black History Month. St. Johnians consistently portrayed this event in a positive light, often describing it as the most positive aspect of the park. Interviews with residents unanimously show that they would like this programme to expand (even if they found room for some improvement). Many St. Johnians also think it could provide additional employment for local people. The fact that it only happens once each year is frustrating to many St. Johnians.

Picture 2. A native St. Johnian demonstrates basket-making for visitors at the Folklife Festival. A locally made doll is on the far left. *(Courtesy Bruce Schoonover)*

Both the cultural resources protection and interpretation divisions are understaffed and underfunded, forcing difficult decisions in the allocations of money, time, and effort. In addition, because there is an urgent need to document and preserve deteriorating historic structures from the plantation era and vanishing pre-historic Taino beach sites, the archaeological investigations have been focused upon these. While these efforts and the interpretation of past eras are important to St. Johnians, our interviews show that people are also concerned that recent eras do not receive as much attention. Failing to provide culturally relevant interpretation con-

tributes to divisiveness and local discontent for the protected areas. It leads to perceptions that the park does not care about local people and fuels the distrust that characterises today's relations between the park and island residents. It complicates park relationships with native residents, exacerbating feelings that the park is not for them or connected to them. Failing to adequately incorporate histories relevant to local residents can be significant and symbolic.

The park is beginning to increase the attention given to the post-emancipation era, particularly the twentieth century. For example, the Chief of Interpretation has made an arrangement for a cultural anthropologist to help prepare a guiding document focused on the interpretation of land use within the park during the twentieth century and the communities who lived there. In addition, the Cultural Resources Manager helped prepared a proposal that in part addresses twentieth-century land use at a major site in the park. Additional possibilities include adding interpretive signs or demonstrations regarding bay rum production, boat making, charcoal making, or cattle rearing throughout the park and commissioning park resource studies that include more extensive treatments of recent histories.[24]

Native St. Johnians, like the original residents near so many parks, have sacrificed for the benefit of all people who enjoy these parks. While, of course, many local people have benefited from the park's creation as well, many more feel that the costs they have endured have long been swept under the rug. Protected areas wield tremendous power as they decide which historical periods they wish to preserve or highlight.[25] A living history that celebrates the life and times of St. Johnians could celebrate their contributions and sacrifices for the preservation of this land, making allies out of many who consider themselves opponents.

What species belong here?

Just as park managers interpret histories, they have the ability to determine which species of plants and animals— and how many— should exist within the park. Official park communications explain that invasive "non-native" species must be reduced to protect the "natural" or "native" habitat, including federally listed endangered species, such as the St. Thomas Lidflower *(Calyptranthes thomasiana)* and the Prickly Ash (*Zanthoxyllum thomasianum)*, and one of the best remaining representative examples of Caribbean dry tropical forest. The fauna with reduction programs include mongoose, cats, rats, feral pigs, and goats. Donkeys do not have a reduction programme but are also considered a threat to native species.[26] Proposals for the control of non-native invasive flora are in the planning process. Some of the flora and fauna, particularly goats, pigs, and donkeys are culturally significant because of their historical uses, particularly during the post-emancipation period.

Although locals often understand that the park needs to control non-native species because they damage native ones and lack natural predators, public perception overall is that the non-native species—culturally significant ones—are targeted in an attempt to return the island to a pre-Columbian landscape. A 1987 report on land use within the park offered a similar observation, noting that "much of the landscape has been deliberately managed to a wilderness state that obscures its cultural dynamic."[27] Moreover, many St. Johnians perceive that the park has chosen certain species over others without regard for local customs and traditions. Some see this as part of an inconsistency in park management decisions to protect some species and destroy others. For example, sweet lime (also known as

limeberry, a local favorite) was targeted for removal at a beach that locals frequent. Meanwhile, almost all of the interpretive signs on the famous Reef Bay Trail in the park contain natural history information celebrating exotic species and explaining their presence on the island.

Park managers are guided by National Park Service Management Policies, which provide for the protection of cultural and historic landscapes and the protection of native species. Managers recognise the merit of incorporating culturally relevant species into park landscapes but they must also adhere to federal laws (*e.g.* the Endangered Species Act). Thus, while park service mandates are to pursue the protection of native species by reducing the non-native ones, they also promote the historic and cultural importance of the non-native species through a cultural landscape program.

Park managers then find themselves in a balancing act. However, it is not merely an *ecological* balance that is important to seek. The park could more actively and clearly emphasise a balance between the native and non-native species and the cultural and historic landscapes in which they are situated. Another option would be to re-evaluate the process of deciding what is or is not native to St. John, perhaps stretching the interpretation beyond strictly ecological criteria. Moreover, the park could temper public frustration through public acknowledgment of the significance of these culturally relevant species.

By acknowledging and even celebrating the cultural role of some of these species the park might treat them as valued local species instead of harmful invaders. By suggesting this, we do not mean to imply that St. Johnians or others value donkeys picking through their trash or goats nibbling their flowers. It also does not mean that we should value the damage these species cause to other species. It means that these species can be valued in both historical and cultural ways and at the same time be controlled within the park. The emphasis could be on promoting the integration of these species into the park landscape and at the same time providing for the protection of federally and territorially listed endangered species. This might be pursued by including goats, hogs, and donkeys as part of certain park landscapes (such as post-emancipation cultural landscapes)[28] but not others, or limiting these animals to an interpretive site. Without attention to the cultural significance of

> Many residents refuse to attend meetings, at times as a form of protest. Many who do attend do so to register opposition to whatever park propositions are discussed. [...] More than half of our interviewees suggest that officials should communicate more often in a less formal manner with local residents.

Picture 3. Feral donkeys are often seen walking along the roadsides, many of which are located within the park. Taking home a photo of a donkey is a favorite tourist pastime. *(Courtesy Crystal Fortwangler)*

these species, the park risks further alienating a population that already feels its sense of place and ownership eroding. A recent positive step in this direction was the inclusion of donkeys and goats in a park sponsored parade float emphasizing the human history of the island.[29]

Culture and Communication

Park communication with the public also suffers from inattention to historical and cultural matters. Most commonly, the Park Service communicates through press releases, requires formal written responses, and holds public meetings, as required by the NEPA process. Many residents refuse to attend meetings, at times as a form of protest. Many who do attend do so to register opposition to whatever park propositions are discussed. Both sets of research show that respondents overwhelmingly recommend that the park change its style of communication.[30] "Come out and mingle," suggested one native St. Johnian. St. John is a small place. Locals want to see park officials talking with locals on the streets, at community gatherings, and playing dominoes at local hang-outs.[31] Another roadblock to developing shared trust between the community and park is the frequent turnover of the Superintendent position, a common practice in the National Park Service. Many expressed feelings of futility in building personal relationships with someone who will be leaving soon.[32]

The formal and infrequent modes of communication employed by the park have led to strong perceptions that local involvement in park decisions is not genuine.[33] A recent example provided by St. Johnians is the perceived lack of communication throughout the process leading up to the establishment of the national monument. Many believe that meetings held by the park are just for show. The Park Service has done little to contest these claims. Comments are taken, and park officials report that they are utilised in planning processes, but no evidence is provided to local residents as to why certain comments were acted upon and others not. People feel as if the curtains close at the end of a meeting and never re-open. Respondents expressed that they did not expect the park to incorporate everything they would like, but they would like an honest effort to respond to concerns with explanations. The fact that the park does not provide post-meeting follow-up leads people to believe that they have been disrespected. Respect – as one would expect — is an important factor in creating positive relationships.

Many St. Johnians view the park historically as yet another largely white (particularly in management), external entity that has usurped local sovereignty, as have prior colonial entities. At times, the Park Service reinforces these sentiments. For example, the initiation of entry fees at Trunk Bay, a popular beach, without exceptions for local residents has caused considerable angst.[34] Although the fee is small, the principle that locals should pay to visit a beach their families have used freely for generations is a direct insult to many. The closing of old trails and roads has generated similar responses. The building of a gate at an access point to privately held lands encompassed by the park a few years ago may be an extreme example of such affronts. The gate was closed to halt illicit activities allegedly occurring in the area. Public debates concerning access to inholdings and the closing of roads have been ongoing for many years. The unannounced closing of the gate re-ignited a passionate flame of resentment.[35] In turn, many St. Johnians

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offered cautious optimism when the new superintendent recently removed the gate altogether.

The make-up and hierarchy of park staff also impacts local viewpoints and reactions. While the park hires a considerable number of local residents, some within the upper echelons of the park's hierarchy, park superintendents have been from elsewhere with perhaps one exception.[36] Many enforcement rangers and most natural resource managers are also from the mainland. Most people believe that decisions made regarding St. John's protected areas are made at the regional office of the Park Service in Atlanta or in Washington, DC. Indeed, decisions such as charging locals park fees or creating the recent monument are often finalised at a higher level, leaving park managers to deal with the local consequences. The relationship between NPS administrative levels makes it difficult to pin down responsibility for certain decisions, which frustrates locals. This further reinforces feelings of local powerlessness and prompts discussions about neo-colonialism amongst local residents.

Locally-hired park staff also play a role in the relationships between the park and locals. Because the park is viewed by many as predominantly foreign, formal, and largely unapproachable, they often rely upon locally-hired people as key brokers of information about the park. When these employees are not brought into the overall park planning, it only solidifies perceptions about the lack of genuine local involvement and cultural sensitivity exhibited by park managers. Both of our studies revealed that minimal consultation with local hires (and Virgin Islanders in general) in the management planning and decisions of the park has a great impact on relationships between the park and community. Based upon patterns of information movement on the island, however, it may be these individuals, positioned at the critical nodes of communication, who could probably best articulate the common ground between the park's interests and those of the local population. Recently, the park hired a St. Johnian to develop a community outreach and media relations plan. This position could provide a venue through which to address some of the issues raised here.

Conclusions

We have highlighted how the concept of land on St. John has changed from something that is shared to something that is owned and restricted. Historically, the lands on St. John were loaned, borrowed and shared locally as needed amongst family, neighbors and different-sized land holders. National Parks, however, are owned in common by everybody in the United States. It should not be surprising that native St. Johnians view protected areas on the island as more of a taking than any sort of giving for the local residents – even if they recognise some benefits. St. Johnians and the protected areas themselves would benefit from a renewed sense of ownership in what they once considered their own.[37]

St. Johnians have a special relationship with the island— a special sense of place, one different than others who have moved to the island. Sense of place is the coming together of memories, experiences, languages, visions, stories, social relations, and identities.[38] It is a merging of one's individual and collective pasts, presents, and futures developed over time in places. Building a sense of place is an individual and cultural process of experiencing and interacting with places with one's body and through social engagements. It is, for example, knowing which tree people gathered under on the island and why – and having a shared or similar understanding

about it, a shared and special relationship to that place, even if you never gathered there, even if the tree is no more. Such trees have or still exist within the boundaries of the park. So does much of St. Johnian history.

Sense of place has a profound influence on how St. Johnians evaluate the park, the recently designated national monument, the Park Service and its support groups. St. Johnians know an island with and without a park. They may articulate an opinion about the park but it is not isolated; it is situated within a web of human and place-based relationships. The protected areas are intertwined with St. Johnians' cultural and social worlds—they are "cultural entities."[39]

We have illustrated the connections between cultural and historical understanding, trust and the maintenance of resources within protected areas on St. John. For instance, appropriate cultural and historical interpretation and communication are very significant in developing the relationships upon which local preservation depends. And neglecting certain aspects of local contexts can lead to impaired management situations.

These are common themes in many protected areas around the world. The primary focus of park management in recent years upon natural resources within protected areas is understandable, as that is the primary mission of many protected areas. However, the continued existence of these resources is contingent upon the human institutions that surround them. Our results show that park planners and managers should place greater emphasis on viewing park neighbors as people who care about the places in which they live and have emotional connections to the landscapes and histories encompassed within protected area borders. In the human-dominated landscapes that surround and infiltrate most protected areas, the successful protection of resources is dependent upon both sound natural resource management and sound management of social relationships. For the latter, careful analyses of the social contexts in which parks are situated appear indeed necessary. Programmatically incorporating such analyses can lead to better relationships with local communities, better visitor experiences, and better resource protection in the long run. Ultimately, such analyses should guide what the PA is all about.

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Notes

1 Brechin *et al.*, 2003; Colchester, 1993.
2 Terborgh and Peres, 2002.
3 Alcorn, 1993; Metcalfe, 1995; Zimmerman *et al.*, 2001.
4 Stern interviewed 44 native St. Johnians, 46 people originally from the U.S. mainland, and 25 from elsewhere. Fortwangler interviewed 46 native St. Johnians and 44 people originally from the U.S. mainland. There is only a small degree of overlap in persons interviewed.
5 We use the term "native St. Johnian" here to refer to persons whose families trace their ancestry on the island back many generations and who would be described in relevant literatures as Afro-Caribbean.
6 See Armstrong (2003) for a detailed account of this unique community living on the east end of island.
7 The cattle estates were owned by a few families of mixed African and European descent with locals working occasionally as laborers; the number of cattle reached a peak in 1930 with fifteen hundred head. For full account of land use history on St. John see Tyson 1984.
8 See also Tyson (1984) and Olwig (1985).
9 Winks, 1997. Rockefeller was also interested in helping local people get jobs. He thought of the park as a way to "save the island from exploitation and help islanders at the same time" (Thruelsen, 1955).
10 Stick was a former artist-illustrator who later turned to the real estate business and became a successful developer of NC beach-front property around Nags Head. He worked with the National Park Service to establish Cape Hattaras National Seashore (1953) and gave land for Wright Memorial in the 1920s.
11 See O'Neill (1972) for a fuller treatment of the beneficial relationship between Caneel Bay and the park. See Olwig (1995) for a detailed discussion of how tourism and the park have impacted the St. Johnian community.
12 Olwig & Olwig, 1979.
13 Fellows, 1958:10.
14 Ibid.
15 Many spoke of the park as having a military style of management and of top park officials' unwillingness to show themselves at local hang-outs or talk casually to people on the streets. Invariably, people report that when more personable superintendents have been in charge of the park, relations have improved considerably.
16 Roberts (2003) also finds a general lack of trust towards the park service on St. John, noting that such lack of trust will preclude any success of an outreach effort (re: conservation of marine

resources). She writes, "there is absolute recognition [by park staff] that *lack of trust* is a major factor that yearns for mending" (11).

17 When trust is included in any model along with these other variables, only the trust variable proves significant at the 95% confidence level. When rational cost-benefits assessments are used in place of the trust variable in the model, the overall predictive power of the model drops to 74.6%.

18 Higher levels of trust and cultural understanding were also correlated with positive actions toward the park, measured as donating money, volunteering, or defending the park in public arenas. The best predictors of positive actions, however, were perceived levels of local empowerment and perceptions about the attitudes of one's peers. Respondents with perceptions of greater local input into park decisions and of higher percentages of peers with positive attitudes were more likely to actively support the park.

19 Roberts (2003) also points out that the interpretive programs at VIIS could gain from an external evaluation, asking "what's missing" regarding interpretation of the "untold stories."

20 There were earlier attempts by interpretive rangers to focus on the island's late 19th and early 20th century subsistence era, but these efforts were not effectively institutionalised.

21 The park recently completed a collections conditions survey and a collections management plan.

22 In addition to the Annaberg festival, this past year the park (with funding from the Friends of the Virgin Islands National Park) worked with a local theatre company to offer a play based on the life and times of a well-known St. Johnian. The play is held in the park every week and attended by locals and tourists. Early reports suggest it is well-received by the St. Johnian community.

23 Additionally, the Friends of the Park recently started a docent program, five days per week during the peak tourist season.

24 The park has previously commissioned studies that include the post-emancipation era. However, they provide minimal attention to the years after 1917. Exceptions are Tyson 1984 and 1987 but these have a very limited distribution.

25 See also Watt (2002).

26 There have been plans proposed for donkey management, such as one prepared by the Feral Animal Task Force on St.John in the early 1990s.

27 Tyson, 1987:16.

28 In 1997, a Park Service regional office identified a list of eight preliminary cultural landscapes for the Virgin Islands National Park. At the time, the park did not comment on the list. The park could pursue this option and encourage post-emancipation landscapes to be included on the list.

29 The idea for such a float was initiated by St. Johnian park employees, an important point relevant to the next section of paper.

30 See Roberts (2003) for recommendations on how the VIIS could improve its communication strategy.

31 Superintendents, for example, have engaged with the St. Johnian community in different ways. St. Johnians point to only a few superintendents who regularly mingled and personally engaged the locals. The current superintendent has made a great effort in this regard.

32 We agree with Roberts (2003) that trust between the community and park would improve if park managers remained longer than a few years.

33 This is consistent with the findings of anthropologist Stephen Koester in the mid-1980s. He concluded that a large part of the conflict between local fishermen and the park stemmed from the "almost complete exclusion of fishermen from any meaningful role in the national park." He argued that to "build a cooperative relationship" the park must pursue a management structure "based on participation rather than exclusion" and a management policy that "extends decision making power and planning to include traditional resource users and residents" (Koester 1986:20-21).

34 This is a general policy of the park service. Because parks are owned equally by every citizen of the United States, locals generally receive no special privileges.

35 The superintendent at the time later regretted not discussing the gate with residents before locking it (page 6 of Virgin Islands Daily News, May 10, 2001).

36 One superintendent did spend childhood years on St. John and worked for the park as a young adult. Some people, however, did not consider him to be truly local, having been born elsewhere. In order to become a superintendent, an employee is expected to move from unit to unit, securing a range of experiences. While there have been a handful of Virgin Islanders who have done this, most people are not interested in leaving the islands in order to pursue this path.

37 Park policy regarding "traditionally-associated peoples" should apply to native St. Johnians. Park recognition of this status would ensure a greater emphasis on the types of communication most St. Johnians would like to see, acknowledging their traditional cultural connection with the landscape that pre-dates the park and thus their legitimate stake in decision-making processes.

38 Sense of place and relationships to places have been approached from numerous disciplines such as anthropology (Feld and Basso, 1996; Low, S. and D. Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003), archaeology (Tilley, 1994), geography (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977), and philosophy (Casey, 1996).

39 Infield (2003) discusses national parks as "cultural entities", arguing that conservation will be strengthened if protected areas are represented in cultural terms.